

THE DEFEAT OF THE DRAINAGE AMENDMENT

THE SUN interviews the Governor on the defeat of the drainage amendment.

How do you account for the defeat of the Drainage Amendment?

It was because the people did not understand the proposition that was submitted to them.

It seems to me that it was a plain proposition, and there should have been no difficulty in understanding it, by any one who would give the matter proper thought.

That is it, but proper thought, sufficient thought, means a great deal, when you take into consideration the fact that it took those of us most familiar with the subject some time to arrive at the conclusion that it was right and necessary to protect the rights of the people, and to evolve the problem and formulate the amendment, or the law of which it is a copy.

Do you consider, Governor, that the defeat of the Constitutional Amendment, relating to drainage, meant that the people of the State were opposed to reclaiming the Everglades?

No, not at all. Every speech on the stump, even of the opposition, said that they favored drainage of the Everglades, but they opposed this method of obtaining the money.

What have you to say to the people, now that the amendment is defeated?

I have this to say to them: That it is my wish that they continue to think about the matter, as I am convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that I am right, and that every one of them will arrive at the same conclusion, if they will think seriously about the matter. The Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund were created in January, 1855, fifty-one years ago, and charged with the duty of draining and reclaiming the Swamp and Overflowed lands of Florida, and, vested with the title to more than twenty million acres of land, and they have, under several contracts, attempted to drain the Everglades. They have dug more than ninety miles of large drainage canals, which are of little or no value, unless connected with the sea, and the present Trustees evolved the present plan of draining the Everglades. They found that former Trustees had deeded, in conformity with legislative grants, four and one-half million acres of lands to railroads and corporations, in the Everglades drainage district, and they, to reclaim the 2,860,000 acres of their lands, in the Everglades, would also be compelled to reclaim four and one-half million acres of lands, deeded by former Trustees. We, therefore, as Trustees, asked the Legislature to make a law authorizing the levy of an acreage tax, not to exceed ten cents an acre in any one year, on the lands in the Drainage District, and the Legislature did so. We defined the lines of that Drainage District, which is composed of portions of Monroe, Dade, St. Lucie, Osceola, DeSoto and Lee, and levied on each acre of taxable, alluvial Swamp and Overflowed land, to which the State had parted with the title, an acreage tax

of five cents an acre, and put up five cents an acre on the part of the people of the State for their 2,860,000 acres, out of the Swamp and Overflowed Land Fund, which fund can be used for no other purpose than drainage so long as that is necessary. The sums levied as a tax and the five cents an acre put up by us were to be used to build 6 large dredges and to operate them for a period of two years, when a levy of one and one-quarter cents per acre for four years more would have completed the reclamation of the territory. As it is now, the only money put up is that put up by the Trustees for the people of the State, which has been used to build two large dredges, and is being used to operate them. One of them is in operation, the other will be in a few weeks. Since the amendment is defeated, we run the risk of losing the amount of money due us under the levy upon the lands owned by corporations and individuals, which amounts to \$225,000, in event the statute under which the levy is made is declared unconstitutional. Of course, I expect no such decision, but the Constitutional Amendment would have served that and an additional purpose. Very often, when large enterprises are entered upon by a State, and expensive and valuable plants are built, and a great work entered upon, designing persons procure the repeal of the statute under which the work is undertaken, which destroys the value of the plant, discourages the people and their representatives thereby, and the designers of the destruction of the work become the owners of the plant and purchasers of the land, and in this case of the land, to the great detriment of the State, and it would have been much safer for the people that the matter be in their hands, under the Constitutional Amendment, which could not be repealed unless the people repealed it.

Governor, do you think that the people mean, by their votes, that they want our Swamp and Overflowed lands sold and the money used to drain the four and one-half million acres of Swamp lands belonging to the corporations, in addition to draining our own 2,860,000 acres?

O, no; had the people understood that to be the case they never would have voted as they did, and as soon as they find that to be the effect of their votes, they will regret that they did not vote for the amendment. The people are all right. They are honest, but they have been deceived by an overwhelming mass of misleading literature. As soon as they realize that all of the expense of drainage must fall upon them unless this tax is paid on the swamp lands in this district, they will find how grossly they have been misled. I ask them to think carefully, as the Trustees have taken up this fight to protect the interests of the people, and I regret exceedingly that we have been unable to place the facts before a sufficient number of the people to cause them to protect their rights at the polls.